. 4. {Whole No. 82.} Price, 10 Cents. Per Annum, $3.00. Vol. IV.

SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 1870.

Subject: Spiritual Stumbling-Blocks.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT:

A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

NEW-YORK:
J. B. FORD & CO., No. 39 PARK ROW.

1870.

AMERICAN NEWS COMPANY, AGENTS FOR THE TRADE.
European Agents, SAMPSON LOW, SON & MARSTON, Crown Buildings, 188 Fleet Street, London.
Sold by all Carriers and News Dealers.

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Brooklyn, January, 1869.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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CLUB RATES, five copies for $12.00. Circulars giving List of Cash Commissions and Popular Premiums for Subscriptions sent free, on application to the publishers. Plymouth Pulpit and The Christian Union together for $4 per annum.

POSTAGE OF PLYMOUTH PULPIT to subscribers in the United States is twenty cents per year, payable quarterly, in advance, at the Post-Office to which the pamphlet is sent; and on single copies to England it is *four cents.*

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SPIRITUAL STUMBLING-BLOCKS.

"Cast ye up, cast ye up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people."—Isa. LVII. 14.

In eastern lands it is, to this day, as it was from the beginning. Society has no life in itself, and is strong only through the government. Whatsoever, therefore, is for the common good, languishes. Roads, which are one of the distinguishing elements of civilization, were either wholly wanting, in olden times, and in oriental lands, or were mere paths. Whenever the king, or some great personage, would travel, couriers were dispatched in advance. The local chiefs were summoned, the people were drafted, and the road upon which the royal *cortege* was to pass was prepared for that special occasion. The holes were filled; the narrow places were widened; the rocks or fallen trees were taken away; the rough places were made smooth. This required both that much be added in some places, and much taken away in others—much "cutting and filling," in the language of modern engineering.

In the passage which I have selected, the cry goes forth, not in behalf of a conqueror, or a sovereign, but in behalf of God's people. They are the honored procession for which a road is to be prepared. "Cast up, cast up,"—that is, heap up, fill in—"prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of my people."

The figure, then, is striking. As royalty demanded for itself a smooth path, a road from which all dangers and obstructions were taken away, so a soul that is on its way to God has thrown over it, as it were, something of the sovereignity which it approaches, and a mysterious voice is heard, crying, "Clear the way! heap up! heap up! cast out the stumbling-stones."

The application of this passage to ourselves is obvious. Life is a road. But each man must know his own way. It is smooth to some. It is rough to others. Some travel on fast and surely. Others are hindered, stumbled, stopped. Some of you have gone on conciously and very far in the Christian life. Some of you have hardly moved beyond the point at which you began.

It may inspire you to enterprise, if I shall point out some of the obstacles which hinder the growth of men in their life as Christians.

Sunday Morning, April 3, 1870. Lesson: Isa. LVII. Hymns (Plymouth Collection): Nos. 639, 660, 566.

To give a personal and spiritual application to this passage—*Cast up, cast up, remove the stumbling-blocks, the stumbling-stones*—I apprehend, in the first place, that the want of a true and large ideal of Christian life, as an inward spiritual and divine disposition, and the attempt to live in mere conformity to rules, and with a vague impression that if one conforms to the church he shall in some way, he knows scarcely how, be saved, is itself one of the causes of perpetual stumbling. The attempt to live merely for the fulfillment of social moralities; the attempt to live so that all the rules which are prescribed by all those who are governing in the Lord, shall be obeyed; the attempt to live upon any such low conception as that of regulations, conventions, observances, is sure to make the Christian life poor, and the travel uncertain. For *a new creature in Christ Jesus* is the apostolic definition of being a Christian. It is the endeavor to substitute for the worldly character a divine and spiritual one. The kingdom of God is to be within us. The evidences of it are to be hope, and joy, and faith, and love, and fidelity. And the aim of the true Christian life is not so much to keep its ordinances, or to believe in this or that disclosure of technical truth: it is larger manhood, patterned on Christ Jesus. It is to make yourself nobler, purer, sweeter, truer, more faithful, more heroic, and more worthy to look God in the face, and say, "I am thy son." We are exhorted to *live worthy of the vocation with which we are called;* and that vocation is son-ship in Christ Jesus. We are to live so that we shall feel worthy to say, "God is my Father, and I am his son."

Now, our aspiration and our effort will be in proportion to the dignity and the ideality, if I may so say, of our conception of what religion is. If we suppose it to be simply not doing evil, we shall put forth but very little exertion, and we shall receive but very little stimulus. We are not to pattern our religion on the Ten Commandments. I marvel to see them so much in vogue as they are yet—although the world needs them. The Ten Commandments, which were the common law for barbarians, but which do not at all epitomize Christian life, except by a stress and torture of construction which, if applied to the rest of the Scripture, would destroy it,—I marvel that men so stick to them. And yet I do not. There is so much stealing, and lying, and wickedness in the world, that I marvel that the Ten Commandments are not used a great deal more than they are. I marvel that, instead of being written merely in churches, they are not put up in the places where Christian men do their business. There is need of the Ten Commandments. However, a man might keep all these, and, like the good young man in the Gospel, do all the outward things required by the Lord Jesus Christ, and yet come short of fulfilling the demands of a true

spiritual religion. Our effort and our self-denial will be in proportion to the magnitude of the conception which we have of the life that is to be led. And if persons come into the Christian life with the impression that it is merely rubbing off little protuberances, or that it is merely acting in conformity with certain requirements of modern Christian societies, they will make slow progress, because there will be no motive to stimulate them to high endeavor and high development.

A *low ideal*, then, is one of the hindrances which men meet with in living a Christian life.

Next, the attempt to live a Christian life with a *low tone of feeling*, is a reason why men do not make greater progress. For, if there is one thing that is exacted more emphatically than any other, it is intensity of feeling. Not only are the great characteristic traits of Christian experience enjoined in the Bible, but the modes of exhibiting those traits is enjoined as well. In all the writings of the New Testament you will find that fervor, intensity, is required in every feeling. For, although our Master does not use the same language that the apostles do, he just as much teaches the necessity of this intensity, where he declares that it is not to be so high nor so inward that it cannot show itself; that it is to be a light which cannot be hid. Men never phosphoresce until they come to intensity of feeling. Men never glow and develop themselves so that every one shall know that they are Christians, unless they have had intense experiences. In other words, one might say that the peculiar fruits of the spirit are like tropical fruits, which cannot ripen without tropical heat.

We have moralities. I may compare them to the plants which grow in the ground, with roots in the dirt. And most excellent crops they are that grow so. But some of the fairest blossoming plants, some of the most beauteous flowers which we have on this platform from Sunday to Sunday, are such as these air-plants which we have here to-day. They have no roots. They fasten themselves upon a branch of a tree, and swing loose in the air, and feed by their leaves, and never touch the dirt; and yet they blossom freely almost all the season. And most fragrant are they. Christian graces are air-plants which do not need dirt to root in. Moralities are good crops—oats, wheat, and what not. Although they root in the dirt, they are very excellent indeed. But we need to have both. We not only need to have moralities, but we need to have Christian graces, which are, as it were, *orchids*, *epiphytes*, and fed upon higher and purer things—light, and moisture, and other elements that the air contains.

Now, none of these can thrive in our temperate climate. A temperate climate is good for temperate things; but for intensities it is not good. And many dominant and characteristic traits of Christian char-

acter are such as never can be brought out without fervor. Yet, how many men there are who are afraid of it, and who, seeing it, at once think, "It is fanaticism!" How many there are who quote, until it is worn out on their lips, "Let your moderation be known unto all men!" Where is it that men are afraid? and what is this moderation that they enjoin upon us? You will never hear such men enjoining moderation where it is *bargain*. You will never hear men, when talking to their children about seeking worldly gain, say to them, "Let your moderation be known." It is when the child is so desirous of going to meeting, and is so much interested in this or that charitable enterprise, and is so addicted to prayer, and so loves the assembly of God's people, and is so intensely kindled with feeling, that they almost fear, as they say, for his reason, and tell him, "Let your moderation be known." If that same child, grown older, or some other youth, under evil counsel, becomes vehemently addicted to business, every day filled with fiery motives for quick gains, does the father ever say to him, "Let your moderation be known?" Never. On the contrary, he looks upon him with undisguised admiration. He can scarcely keep from spoiling him with flattery. And he says, "If his life is spared, he has the making of a man in him." Every feeling and impulse in that child is worldly. He is full of greed for gain. He is intense and sharp in his secular nature. But there is no counsel of *moderation* from the father now. On the other hand, let one become intensely interested in the welfare of his fellows; let him night and day ponder as to how men shall be made better; let him give up his comfort for the sake of reclaiming men; let him be filled with "psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs;" let him give himself to the Lord Jesus Christ, as if the invisible were real, and as if God were his, and men are alarmed, and say, "Let your moderation be known."

I would to God that there were more temptation to fanaticism than there is. I think fanaticism to be an evil; but it is an evil that *we* are not very liable to. Our temptation is the other way. And, in general, it seems to me that men do not enough mark the necessity of intense, fervent—continually fervent and intense—religious experience, to facilitate their courage along the royal road. If your feelings are right, do not be afraid of having them too deep. For, while the passions, while all the lower feelings, are apt to wear a man out by intensity, it is one of the peculiarities of the moral sentiments, that they nourish and feed men. Excitement in the higher realm of feeling does not wear men out. Hope, and love, and joy in the Holy Ghost—men can go on feeding upon these experiences day in and day out, week in and week out, year in and year out. It is the passions that wear. It is the appetites that grind out the fibre of life.

Meanwhile, many who are well commenced in the Christian life, many whose faces are rightly set, many who have begun to walk in the royal road, fail from feebleness; from a want of intensity of Christian feeling.

Read, when you return home, to see whether these things be so. Read particularly the closing chapters of the various epistles of the apostles, and see in how many cases you will find the necessity for intensity of feeling repeated, and emphasized and re-emphasized.

I remark again, as one of the hindrances to growth in Christian life, *lack of deep and continuous devotion.* This is either from the want of a sense of the great spirit-world on whose border we live perpetually, or it is the result of excessive occupation, over-occupation, which crowds, all the time, and prevents one from ripening in a true Christian devotion. There is an utter liberty granted to everybody in respect to his mode of devotion; but there is no liberty as to whether he shall or shall not be devout, and worship from day-to-day. A flower might just as well attempt to get along in summer without the dew that falls upon it, as a Christian attempt to live without daily communion with God. An eagle that cannot fly; a nightingale that cannot sing; a vine that cannot bear grapes; a flower that cannot blossom—that is a heart that does not pray, and does not love to pray.

Why is it that there are so many whose prayers are formal; whose devotion is a duty, rather than an attraction, and a bewitching attraction at that? It is very largely, I think, because men know *God* rather than *Christ.* I do not mean that our prayers may not sometimes ascend unto God. I do not say that veneration may not seek for those peculiar developments of the divine nature which come to us through the eternal Father. But that for which the heart is hungry is companionship; and our companionship is to be with the Lord Jesus Christ; and our devotions will tend to become tender, and familiar, and nourishing, and companionable, if we are wonted to commune with Christ.

What is devotion? What is worship? If the young artist stands in the presence of his master, asking him of everything that pertains to the art which is common to them, recognizing the superiority of that artist master, revering him, and yet communing with him face to face, that is what we call devotion when the soul does it to God. This the soul may do toward the Father, if it is drawn thither. It may do this toward the Holy Spirit, if it is drawn in that direction, as some ideal natures—the mystics—are. It may do it toward the Lord Jesus Christ, if it needs the embodiment of God manifest in the flesh. Whoever draws near to God in the spirit of sincere, winning, loving, filial conversation, worships. This is prayer, this is communion, whatever may be the mode. Some shall pray by the lips of another; some shall pray

by their own lips; some shall pray in silence—without uttered thoughts; some shall pray at stated seasons; some shall pray only in circumstances that inspire peculiar feeling; some shall pray by written forms; and some without them. The range is large. The liberty is absolute. That which your experience teaches you to be best, you have a right to. But one thing is to be common. We are to pray. We are to *abound* in prayer.

Why is it, then, that there is so little of it? Why is it that those who have the privilege, and who have learned the language of prayer, so seldom or so ineffectually pray? My own impression is that no person prays to effect who does not pray till the heart and the imagination are touched. It is not until some such effect is produced upon us, that we really do pray. So short a time frequently is set apart for prayer, and so unprepared do men come into the presence of God, that by the time they have finished their devotions, they have scarcely become conscious of the reality of spiritual things. They leave off just when they should have begun. But till we feel the power of the world to come; till we feel that this suffocating and narrowing horizon has begun to open itself, and stretch out its circles, and that there is the touch of the infinite coming in upon the soul; till we begin to feel that we do see Him who is invisible—till these things take place, prayer is wasted. The most of that which is called *family prayer*, and *prayer in the closet*, is, I fear, only the husk of prayer, and not the true kernel, and does not feed the soul.

The want of devotion makes every effort at Christian life a burden. With devoutness, with the fiery elevations which come from devotions, with the realization of the great spiritual realm above us and around about us, a thousand things become easy. The heart that loves God, and goes to him in prayer, finds things to be light which others find to be heavy. Duties are no longer duties, but they become volitions; and men do automatically what aforetime they did, if at all, imperfectly, by force. And there can be no eminent development of Christian life without this. It is the breath of the soul.

This takes hold, naturally, of another prominent need—namely, the abiding sense, in the Christian life, of God's presence. I mean by this, the art of carrying the suggestion of God through the realm of sense and secularity. There be many who seek their God in the closet. There should he be sought, and there should he be found; but no person can live in the full enjoyment of Christian faith who cannot carry God's conscious presence with him into the world, into his business, into his pleasures, everywhere. It is said of one of old, "He walked with God." That is, he lived with him. It is said of Moses, "He endured as seeing him who is invisible." That is the philosophical so-

lution of his wonderful success. It is said, "The pure in heart shall see God." It is said, "He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit"—*he that* ABIDETH *in me and I in him.*

There is a training by which every object of nature almost, and every evolution in society, will suggest the presence of God. It seems to me that men who invent symbols by which to suggest moral qualities and moral facts, are like persons who, by the side of the ocean, attempt to manufacture water to supply it. The great physical globe itself is one majestic system of symbolism indicating moral truths. The human mind is so formed in adjustment with the great physical, natural world, that if we are right with God, and rightly trained, every object in nature becomes suggestive of some moral quality, or some phenomenon in Christian life, or some spiritual truth or being. What is there that has not been appropriated and sanctified? The mountains; the cedars on them; the clouds above them; the birds in them; the fields below them; the brooks that flow from them; the rocks that compose them; the shadows which they cast; the refuge which they are in times of trouble and war; all events in the farming life; all processes in the industrial life of civilized nations; the sea; the summer; the winter; the house; the magistrate; the judge; the father; the animals upon the earth, and the fowls of the air; whatever there is all through nature—these things God has employed to convey to us some suggestion of the divine presence, and of divine truth. And no man can dwell in the conscious presence of God who has not the art of having the sense of God brought into him by some of the continually occurring events of life, or by some of the ever-existing realities of the physical world. He that can look up into the heaven at midday, and dwell long, and yet return his thoughts whence they came, without once having felt that God was there—I pity him. He that can look into the darkness of the night, and come back again to the light of his own countenance, and not have found God there—I pity him. He that can sit down upon a bank on which the sun shines moderately in the spring and watch the roots, and young insects, and all that nature is doing there, and not have one single thought of God—I pity him. He that can hear the sounds of the night, the voices of the sea, or feel the stillness; he that can look upon the face of a friend; he that can witness a marriage feast, or stand in the marble presence of death; he that can go anywhere, and not have the shadow of the eternal Throne cast upon him—I pity him. He that has to hunt for his God, and shuts his God up in a closet, and keeps a lock and key on him, and goes there to find him—I pity him. My God is everywhere. If I ascend up to heaven, he is there. If I go down and make my bed in hell, he is there. If I fly east, west, or any whither, he is there; and

he only can be considered a growing Christian who has the art of carrying him everywhere.

Another hindrance which men find on the road of progress in their Christian life, is their ignorance as to the effect of outward activity in developing inward fervor, and the effect of inward fervor in developing outward activity—as to the effect of the *reciprocal action of the inward and the outward life.* Men are accustomed to separate these qualities, which never should be disjoined. We ought to have strong feeling, and strong feeling ought always to take on the form of activity. Nothing is more unwholesome than strong feeling which gives itself no embodiment. That is the secret of the mischief which is done by fiction. Works of fiction are just as wholesome as anything else, if they are read wholesomely. But there is a principle which few understand—namely, that it is never healthy to excite strong emotions unless you give them a chance to commute themselves into deeds. All intense feeling ought to have the liberty of taking on some outward expression. If you excite a feeling, and deny the expression of it, it acts inwardly, and wastes and corrupts it, paralyzing the nerve out of which it has sprung. If, therefore, you read of heroic deeds, and your eye is suffused, and you shut up the book, and go back to the vulgarity of your every-day life without giving any other expression to this heroic excitement, it by-and-by lowers essentially the whole tone of capability in the soul. Whoever has pity, should do something to manifest pity. Whoever has love, should do something to show love. Commute high feeling into some form of action, and then it both blesses others and nourishes you; but mere emotion, without expression, is bad. And it is just as bad in the closet of the mystic as it is over the novel. There is many and many an unwritten novel. There is many and many a person to whom God gave the power of motive, and the production of feeling, and who has given himself up to what is called *meditation*, or holding one's self outside of life. All the power of his reason and imagination fill his soul full of beautiful thoughts and sweet feelings, but they remain thoughts and feelings, and never take on any other form of activity. And that is not well. It is one reason why persons are no better in monks' cells than out of them, or in caves than in houses. Simple meditations and fancies are not good for the soul, except as a change for a short time. The law of life is, *Feeling expressed*—feeling put into some form of activity befitting that feeling.

If, therefore, in your Christian experience, you worship God, if you love Christ, and if you would enter into the mystery of Christ's dying and atoning work, you must, when the feeling rises up, attempt to do the thing which the feeling itself indicates. You must become Christ to others in that real sense which was implied in the words of the

Saviour, when he told the disciples that if he, their Lord and Master, had washed their feet, they also ought to wash one another's feet. And so we commute into some form of positive activity whatever Christian experience or feeling we desire to have in the soul fresh, continuous, and harmless. I have known many and many a person that became very religiously selfish. I have known many and many a person that became so in sympathy with God, and spirituality, and ideality, that he had almost no sympathy with things as they actually are; that he cared very little to leaven life, and to benefit life.

But, on the other hand, it is just as important that actions should culminate in emotions, as that emotions should culminate in actions. It is not enough that a man should have a mere perpetual machine life. A man may be active in the Christian cause; he may disseminate tracts; he may attend meetings, and speak; he may organize, and work; he may do a great deal of good in various ways; and yet he may be imperfect in this, that his own soul is growing lean. He may become a mere factor in the spiritual realm.

Both of these things should play into each other. Men should be active that they may be emotive; and they should be emotive, that emotion may work into activity. And it is the want of this reciprocal influence of activity and emotion working together, that hinders many persons from rising into the higher moods of Christian life.

I may remark, again, that a very common hindrance to Christian development is the attempt of men to perform their Christian work outside of their appropriate spheres. There are a great many who feel that that is Christian work which is different from their common every-day duty. There may be something more than every-day duty which goes to constitute the whole of our Christian life—there ought to be; but, after all, every man's first duty as a Christian is in the calling in which God's providence has placed him. We are taught, and we feel, that our position in life is the result, not of accident or chance, but of the divine ordering. And whether God has ordered you to stand in the household or out of it, in the mine or on the ship, in the store or in the office, on the farm or in the shop, wherever he has placed you, there is your first duty. Your first duty is to subdue that business in which you are engaged, to the uses of religion. What I mean is, that it is incumbent on every man to conduct his business so that it shall be a means of grace; so that he shall not have to leave his calling for the sake of his religion, or to get a chance to be religious, but shall be religious *by* his calling, and *through* it. That is the Bible teaching. And it is strictly illustrated by the apostle, in his reasoning, in many places. I will cite but one passage—that in the seventh chapter of 1st Corinthians, where he says,

"Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it, rather."

There you find, in that verse, the philosophy of all those questions that are struggling for settlement to-day. The question of woman's right to speak; the question of the subject's duty to his sovereign; the question of democracy—all these questions are summed up in that one verse. The apostle gave direction for Christian conduct in regard to the state of society which existed. He did not touch the question as to whether they might by appropriate agitation change that state of society. He simply argued, all the way through, on this basis: *As things now are, such and such is your duty.* He left open the question, *What will your duty be when things have been changed by development?* And in regard to servants and slaves, his declaration is, "Are you called, being a slave? Do not think that Christianity requires you instantly to break your bonds. That is not your duty. Emancipation is not the first fruit and result of being called. Are you called so? do not care for it. There is room enough, and there are things enough, in your state as a slave, by which you can glorify God, and set an example before men."

"Art thou called, being a servant? care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it, rather."

In other words, prefer it. Still, it is not indispensable that a man should be free. One may be a slave, and yet be a Christian, and worship God. And by his example, by his heroism, he can make all men know the power of Christ upon the human soul.

"For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman [if he is not his master's]; likewise, also, he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant."

Here is a paradox. It works both ways.

"Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God."

This, which was argued here in respect to just one relation, has been argued above in regard to the relation of husband and wife, where one is heathen and the other is Christian. The general principle laid down, is, that our calling, our business, our relationships one to another in which true religion finds us, we are to accept. We are, as it were, to permeate our avocation and our relations with the Christian spirit in such a way that our daily duty shall be itself a means of grace.

I think every physician should find in his duty as a physician the means both for nourishing his own body, and for doing good to his fellow men. I think that every lawyer should not be obliged to go out of his office and turn the key in order to find his God. He should carry himself in his profession as a minister of justice and peace; and instead of finding him quarreling and wrangling, we should find him administering his daily trust and duty with the feeling that he is serving both God and man, and that he is made more fit for secret commun-

ion by the very work which he is performing all day long. I think every merchant and banker ought to find in his daily avocation that which nourishes his conscience, his reason, his spiritual forces. I think every woman should find in the cares of the household that which should be an almoner of piety to her. Every child should find himself lifted up and made better by his association with children. Everybody, going to school, should find in his duty as a scholar—in his duty to his class, to his master, and to the whole school—not only the cultivation of his intellectual powers, but also food for his religious life.

Whatever your state may be, whether you are in a printer's loft or a collier's dark cave; wherever your lot may be cast, your first duty is to subdue your present business. When I hear men saying, "I cannot be a Christian in my situation," I say, "Probably you would not be one in any situation." When I hear men saying, "It is impossible for me to be a Christian where I am," I say, "You are discontented where you are, and it is not likely that you would be contented anywhere."

Wherever you are, there begin the battle; there subdue everything that stands in conflict with the law of conscience, and the law of love, and the law of purity, and the law of truth. Begin the fight wherever God sounds the trumpet, and he will give you grace that *as your day is, so your strength shall be.* But until we cease dividing our life into two parts—secular and religious—we never shall be very eminent and consistent as Christians; we never shall make any very great progress in the Christian life. Men are accustomed to think that their Bible is cut into two grand divisions—the Old Testament and the New. They think that the Old Testament is a pretty wild book; that there is a good deal of worldly matter in it; that in Old Testament times men were allowed a range, and did things, which would not be tolerated for a moment in the New Testament. That is to say, it is a book of the early growth of the race, and it discloses to us both what was the average attainment of God's people during the period which it embraces, and also what was the relative instruction required by that stage in the development of the human family. But men believe that it is a book of wild, and almost savage liberty. The New Testament they believe to be a book of piety and far more grace and spirituality. And they divide their lives just so. They have the old man and the new man, in place of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The old man does all the wickedness, and the new man all the piety. And so they have a religion that they try to take care of. During family prayers, and on Sundays, and on festivals through the year, they serve the new man; but all the rest of the time they let the old man have his way. You must slay the old man, and you must have a new man in Christ

Jesus—and that always and everywhere—or you cannot *grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.*

There are many who, although they may not fail in these respects, fail in an unexpected direction—I mean by excess of things right. I know many persons who are in right courses, and have substantially right views, but who go beyond all prudence and all bounds of discretion in the use of themselves. I know many women who, in the family, and in the school, every day exert themselves a half more than they have any right to. They give rise to swarms of morbid feelings which they always lay to the devil's charge, but which God always sets down to their own account. They exhaust themselves by an industry so far beyond their own capital and their own endowment of strength, that they are perpetually held back and hindered. They are hurt in their Christian life by excess.

The same thing is true out of the family and out of the school—in business. Many and many a man does more work in one day than he has a right to put into three. Many a man works so that he breaks the law of God in almost every single point. Excess of enterprise and industry is a national sin with us.

Now, I hold that there are special emergencies in man's life when he has a right to draw on his capital. If there is sickness in the household, and you are the only well one there, it is not a time for you to talk about health. There are certain things that must be done, and you must do them. It is right, in times of great peril, when the ship may be foundered, or in times of battle, or in other emergencies in men's histories, when they are not to hesitate to draw on their resources. But these are exceptional cases. The ordinary law is, that no man has a right to go beyond a certain amount of consumption of his excitability. If he does, there comes a reaction, with all its morbid feelings, its temptations, its suggestions, and its irritableness. You sacrifice a thousand times more graces of the spirit by irritableness which comes as the result of over-exertion and inordinate activity, than you can gain by prayers and reading. Great men like Count Cavour in Italy, Bismarck in renovated Germany, Bright in young England, and Lincoln in our own calendar—it is right that they should have wasted the very fountains of life to bear up their times. A great work God gave them to do. They live long lives who live much, and these men lived the life of a thousand ordinary men, though they all broke themselves down by excessive taxation.

But that is not the law of the private. It is contrary to the duty of the mass of men. And yet, there is many and many a man in this congregation who is sinning against God every day of his life by excessive industry. There is many a man and many a woman here who

is breaking God's laws in nature, and breaking them in society, and breaking them in social relations, by an unwitting exhaustion through excessive activity.

As long as people say, "I cannot help it," they will not help it. *Cannot help*, although it is an extreme excuse and remedy, is a very dangerous one.

I have known men who *could not help it.* I have expostulated with men on the subject of such an excessive addiction to worldly toil; and they have said to me, "My affairs are peculiar, and they are in just such a state now that it is impossible for anybody else to take charge of them. I must carry them through." But within a week they were taken down with bilious fever, and could not get off their bed. And yet, their affairs went right along just the same as though they had been able to attend to them. I have never seen a man whose affairs could not get along when he was sick and could not get off his bed. The affairs of such a man may limp, they may creep, but they will *get along.* There is one thing that you may be sure of—that you will get through life, and that your affairs will get along, in one way or another; and half the time it is conceit, as much as it is conscience, that makes a man say, "I must keep my hands on the reins, or things will go so that I shall defraud and injure those who are connected with me on every side." Retrench. Draw in. Be less, and do less. Do better, and be better for doing better.

There is many a man who does not suspect it, but when he says, "I do not speak in meetings; I have had no great experience; I do not wish you to call upon me to pray; I have no gifts in prayer," it is as if I were to take a sponge full of water and dripping, and squeeze it till there was not a single drop of water in it, and then ask the sponge, "How do you feel?" and it should say, "Dry and arid. There is no moisture in me." No, it is all squeezed out. Here are men who take their hearts, that are just as full of feeling as anybody else's, and squeeze them so dry that there is not a drop left. Business has got it all. And they come to meetings, and say, "I have no experience to give. There is nothing in me." Why should there be? If you have used it all up for this world, of course you have none for the world to come.

I may remark, again, upon *too powerful companionship* as one of the influences which impede men in the Christian life. There is a very great benefit designed, to be sure, in the divine economy of life from companionship; but too much companionship is not good. Being too much in company, being too much with each other, being with too many people, is not good for those who would be Christians.

Did you ever know the difference between lumber grown in an open field and lumber grown in a forest? Ask the men at the Navy Yard

whether they prefer pasture-grown white oak or white oak that is forest-grown. They will tell you that they prefer three times over the pasture tree, that has had the wind and rain strike it on every side, and that, with its wide-spreading branches, draws to itself more nutriment than it is possible for the forest tree to get. Such a tree is tougher, and hardier, and better, and lasts longer, than a tree in the middle of the forest, that cannot send out any side branches, and derives strength from the wind, and nourishment from the rain.

People in cities, or people out of cities, with too much company, are like forest trees—long and spindling, so that nothing but the top ever gets the light; and they are weak from top to bottom. The need of a certain tough individuality, requires that a man should set himself free from over-addiction to companionship, even though it is good. The breath of men in a crowded room is not healthy for you to breathe; and the breath of many souls is unwholesome. Every man should have a chance to swing his arms around in every direction without hitting anybody. You ought to have room for your own being. The packing of men together destroys that individuality in which is all progress and all merit as before God.

This stands closely connected with another social hindrance to the development of true Christian life, and that is, the addiction of men to *pleasure*. I mean, not indulgence in wasting and disallowable pleasures, but an excessive addiction to recreation of any kind.

The first law which I should lay down, is the sovereign right of every man to make himself happy, and to be happy, in due measure. Not that happiness is the ultimate object to be achieved. Happiness is the concomitant of every right step toward the true end of living, which is a noble manhood in Christ Jesus. We live to make noble men and women of ourselves. And in doing that we have a right to enjoyment. For enjoyment flows with the normal activity of every faculty of our nature. But no person has a right to any pleasure, no matter how good or innocent it may be, in kind or in degree, beyond that which makes him a stronger and a better man. And nobody can tell that so well as the man himself, or his nearest friends.

Let us come right down from general statements to the questions which are agitated among you. May persons play cards? May persons dance? May persons go to the theatre? May persons go to the opera? May persons go to promiscuous parties and balls? My general reply is, that whatever thing you have tried, and have proved, and shown yourself to be superior to, in your religious development, so that the men around about you do not doubt it, you have a right to. If you make such an impression upon all whom you meet, that they say, of you, "He is a God-fearing man; he has religion," then you have a

right to pleasure, though it may come through these adjuvants or instruments—going to opera, playing cards, and the like; and any particular kind that you may ask about will not hurt you. But if you are a man of pleasure, and if when you go among men, they say of you, "He has no savor of religion about him; he has no power of the eternal world on him," then your pleasures harm you.

It is the flavor, not the name, that sells fruit. If I take an apple and I am told that it is a wilding or a seedling, and when I bite it is mellow, full of juice, and full of sweetness as well as juice, and full of spiciness as well as sweetness, I do not care whether it grew on this tree, or that tree, or the other tree, I pronounce it a good apple. On the other hand, if it be a *Mela Carla*, of Italy, and it is hard and insipid, I do not care for its name or honored growth: if it is a poor apple, it is *a poor apple*. There is a law of soil, and there is law of growth; but, after all, *by the fruit shall ye know*.

If a man comes to me and says, "I have a right to hear Booth's Hamlet," and I know that he is foremost in the prayer-meetings, and foremost in reclaiming men, and foremost in works of self-denial for the good of others; if I know that when I go into his presence I feel rebuked for my worldly-mindedness; if I know that he has a nature that lifts him higher than common Christians, it is not for me to question his right to that pleasure. But if he does not go higher than that pleasure, it is for me to say to him, "Your pleasure swamps you." If he says, "It is not harmful *per se*, and it does not hurt anybody." I say to him, "I do not care whether it hurts any body *per se* or not, it has a bad effect on you. And whether it hurts you or not, is to be found out by looking at the way you live, and the way you talk, and seeing where the end of your life is, and where the emphasis of your spirit is." If a man is living above the world; if the tendency of his nature is away from worldliness, nobody will criticise his indulgence in pleasure; but if he indulges in pleasure, and lacks spirituality, then even permissible things have become harmful to him. Here is the law. We must live for God, and for our fellow men; we must have a heart that feeds higher than mere self-indulgence; and if pleasure is a mere minister of self-indulgence to you, you are to disallow it; but if, living preëminently in the Christian life you find that you can take pleasures without harm to yourself, then they are yours, as between God and yourself.

Well, is there no other question? Yes, oh yes, there is another question. What is that? It is the great question as to what a man may do with his rights. Paul takes the ground that every man must assert his personal rights. Now the question is, having once shown that I can indulge in such and such pleasures without any harm to me,

and with some benefit, shall I go on and indulge in them without any regard to the effect which my indulgence may have on others? "Oh no," says Paul. "There is no harm in your eating meat dedicated to an idol, but if your brother sees you do it, and, misunderstanding the whole of it, is led conscientiously into wrong, then you do not act wisely or kindly; for you use your right to break down his conscience and his right.

There are two principles in regard to rights. The first is to ascertain and vindicate them; and the next is to subject them to the law of love. There are a great many things that I have a right to, till love comes and says, "Will you not forbear them for the sake of others?" I have a right to eat meat; but for me to do it under circumstances such, that my whole household are led to eat it, and they are thrown into a fever, is wrong. For the sake of keeping my children well, I would abstain from eating meat. I have a right to drink wine; but if I found that my drinking wine would lead poorer men to drink whiskey, or the young men around about me to drink wine, I would say to myself, "Shall I use a right of mine in such a way as to destroy my fellow men for whom Christ died? That would not be acting wisely nor well."

There are a great many persons who take pleasures to excess—things which do not agree with their stomachs; and they are dyspeptic all the time simply on account of their pleasures. There are a great many persons who take pleasures which disagree with them because their effect is to bring them into conflict with their fellow men; and so they are violating the law of love in their natures. And in both ways pleasures impede their progress in the Christian life.

Let no man, therefore, suppose that I hold that pleasures are to be disallowed. I am the son of a King. The owner of the universe is my Father. He owns the heavens and the earth. There is nothing on the face of the broad earth that he has not made, and that he does not own. And it is all mine. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof;" and all the fulness of the earth is mine. But it is my law as well as my pleasure to use all things in such a way that they shall contribute to the welfare of my fellow men, and to my own spiritual elevation, and to the glory of God.

But that is not enough. You have not settled the whole question when you have asked, "Is the thing itself right? Nor have you settled it when you have asked, "Is it right for me, so far as my individual profit is concerned?" There is a third question, namely, "Can I do it and yet discharge all the duties of pity, and mercy, and helpfulness to those around about me?" When you have settled this question, "Is it right before God and my conscience, and is it benevolent to

those who are around about me?" then you will have settled the whole matter, and not till then.

There are a great many persons who are not conscientious about pleasures. Some do not take enough, and some take a great deal too many, for their own good, or for the good of others.

But time fails me to press and probe still further these practical questions. Every man must find out his own hindrances and obstructions in the road which he has to travel. He may receive help from the admonitions of the pulpit, and from the councils of faithful Christian friends; but the duty of searching himself is incumbent upon every one. We are bound to *grow in grace*. If we do not grow, we are bound to know the reason why.

Christian brethren, are you fulfilling this duty? Are you moving forward on the way of life? Are you further along in the Christian life than you were when you began? Do many of you look back upon that time as the brightest in your history? Woe to that man who finds the brightest experiences of his Christian life in the very beginning of it! For, although there are joys that will be fondly remembered forever, there ought to be fruits of substantial victories in later life that shall quite eclipse in depth and power any early experiences. It is a shame to say that the whole after manhood is not so potential for serving God as the nascent state of Christian experience. Are you living in a nearer communion with God? Do you have a better understanding of Christ? Is it easier for you, when you are in trouble, to lift yourself up above it? Is it easier for you, when you are in care, to lift yourself above care? Is it easier for you to stand with your hand on the lion's mane, as the old prophet did in the lion's den, and yet suffer no harm? Can you walk in the fiery furnace? and do you find that the form of the Fourth is by your side? Are you living so that neither sickness nor health, neither adversity nor prosperity, can reach up to touch your settled peace? Is your life hid with Christ in God? And are you growing in these directions? If you are not, what is the matter with you? Is it some secret sin? Is it some desirable thing which you know of in your affairs? Is it some hatred? Is it some feud? Is it some bitterness? Is it some revenge? Is it some cherished selfishness? Is it some neglect? Are you living in the full light of God's countenance, and in the enjoyment of perfect peace in Christ Jesus? If you are not, why should the children of the King go mourning all the day? And why is it that you are living so far behind what you ought to? Is it not time for every one to examine and ascertain why?

For, the time is drawing near, to many of us, in which the greatness of the way will have been passed, and all our battles will have been fought, and we shall approach the celestial city, and Him who

dwells therein. And then, in that hour of royal meeting, to have been in conflict, and to have gained victories through suffering, will be more to us than to have empires, or treasures uncountable in our hand. Remember Him who bought you with his own blood. Remember Him who waits for you in heaven. Think of them who have gone before, and are victorious to-day. And lift up holy hands of fresh consecration. Begin again, and fight boldly unto the end of life.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We bless thee, thou Eternal King, manifest to us both in Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit in our own hearts, and in our own experiences, that thou art crowned with praises; that there is a land where there is no crying; where there are no tears and no sorrows. There is a land which is ripe; where eternal summer dwells without, and yet more within; and where every affection blossoms, and exhales the fragrance of love and gladness. And thou art walking in the midst of thine own redeemed ones, and in the midst of those who have kept their first estate. And thou art forever to them the Chief among ten thousand, and altogether lovely. They behold thee; and as flowers upon which the sun looks cannot but open and grow beautiful, so thy looking upon them becomes life and joy and gladness, and they begin to sing, and their every thought is praise, and their very life is worship, and worship is love and joy.

We are glad that above the storm, and above the sound of earthly troubles, there abides this land of sacred peace. Thither have flown some that sang by our side. There are some whom we folded and taught to speak with earthly language. There rest many who taught our hearts to love. There are the chief desired ones; and we are glad for their escape. Nor is the world altogether poorer for their going. They are with us yet, with more power than when they were bodily present. When we rise to our better selves, and by faith can discern the invisible, we are not separated from them. In our holiest thoughts, and in our purest affections, we are more theirs than ever we were in the infirmities of the common earthly life. They are not taken from us. They are but a step before us. It is their voice which we hear crying out perpetually, from the invisible city, Come, come. And we are coming. We are coming toward them, and toward thee that hath made them lovely, Lord Jesus. By faith of thee, by the strong drawing of thy love, by the gracious light and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we are coming to that higher and better life. Would that our steps were faster. Would that we might begin to fly. Yet we are grateful for any movement. We are grateful that we have learned thee; that our face is set thither; that the light strikes upon our countenance; that we behold thee sometimes, and see the city itself afar off, as pilgrims behold the glimmering city which they have not nearly reached; that we are in sympathy with them; and that there are many hours in which we can stand in Zion and before God, with the Spirits of just men made perfect, and enter into sympathy with all their rejoicings and thoughts. For all these things we thank thee.

And now, we pray that thou wilt not suffer us, by reason of any earthly and remaining desires, to bind ourselves fast. Especially permit us not to set up for ourselves idols anywhere along the road. Let us not seek ever to build tabernacles in which to worship thee. May we feel that we are strangers and pilgrims in this world. Here we are trained. Here, by the labor of our hands, by the care of each day, by the lesson of the sanctuary, by the duties of home, by the inspiration of a common and struggling life, thou art educating us for a higher manhood. May we bear our part well. May we not seek to throw off our burden before thy will is made known to us. May we not desire to go before we are called. May we be willing to abide here, although it is better to be with Christ than to be in this mortal life. And may we be willing to dwell, if need be, at the foundations, where no man shall see us work. May we be willing to work, though we see the work of others bringing the admiration and praise of men, while ours is hid. May we be willing, for Christ's sake, to work in obscure things, in things hidden, in things which men will never know. Oh! that Jesus might be to us so near, so dear, and so real, that all our work of life should be consciously done for him. Whether we serve or are served, whether we

are in high places or low, whether we are in joy or in pain, may we still feel that every breath and every endurance in life is an offering to Jesus.

And so, Lord, since thou hast suffered for us, may we be willing to suffer a little for thee and for ourselves. Wert thou crowned with thorns—and shall we not have some thorns? Shall we not drink that bitter cup which thou didst drink? Shall we be unwilling to be children of pain, that we may be children of glory? Rebuke, we beseech of thee, our faint-heartedness, and our want of courage, and our want of honor toward thee. May we be willing, we beseech of thee, O Lord our God! to be chastised at thy hands, that we may rise from servants, and become sons, and become worthy to be sons, and be inspired with that same filial love, and that same sense of honor, which children have toward honored parents.

We pray that thou wilt bless all those who are beginning to seek thee, and to find their life in thy ways and commandments. If at first it is rough to their feet, if at first the burden is heavy, and the yoke is hard, let them not be discouraged. May they remember thy promise, that the burden shall grow light, and that the yoke shall become easy. And we pray that their faith may not fail them until they prove thy word. Turn not any backward, nor suffer them themselves to go away. To whom shall they go but to thee? Where is there such patience, where is there such love, where is there such provident care, where is there such example, as there is in thee? And if they turn away from thee, on whom shall they lean?

Save the imperiled. Rescue the tempted. Strengthen the weak that are to be carried into captivity unless thou dost rescue them.

And we pray that thou wilt fill thine own people with some of that compassion, with some of that pity which thou hast felt for lost men. And may they never be weary in well-doing. May they labor on, not knowing which shall prosper, this or that, or whether both alike shall fail.

And we pray that thou wilt bless all those who labor in word and in doctrine. Remember our schools. Bless the teacher and the taught. Bless all those who go forth to preach to the lowly and the ignorant. And we pray that thou wilt grant that those who are merciful may themselves obtain mercy.

Wilt thou spread the tidings of salvation through Jesus Christ to all; and may the power of the Saviour's love be felt by all hearts. And that glorious day which has lingered too long—may it at last begin to show its bright colors on the mountain, and the glory of the Lord begin to shine, and all the earth see thy salvation.

We ask it for Christ's sake. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON

Our Father, we pray that thou wilt bless the word spoken. We beseech of thee that thou wilt send it home to every understanding conscience, and to every heart. May we all live in a glorious discontent with ourselves, and in a glorious peace with thee; and may we so look upon our sins, and the sinful estate of our hearts, that we shall turn away perforce, and find our rest in thy glorious goodness, and in thy great mercy, and in thy redeeming love. Lord Jesus, thou hast nourished us. Thou hast rebuked us by thy providences and chastisements. Rebuke us still, and suffer us not to settle down into such captivity of indolence, or into such wrong ways, that we shall fail at last to see thee in thy heavenly home. Still smite us, and disturb us. Still stir us up to activity, and bring us, at last, when life is over, and all its conquests are won, to cast our crowns at thy feet, and say, Not unto us, not unto us, but unto thy name, be the praise for ever and ever. *Amen.*

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